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1.

HISTORY

OF

THE ABIPONES.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE TERRITORY, ORIGIN, AND VARIOUS NAMES OF THE ABIPONES.

THE Abipones inhabit the province Chaco, the centre of all Paraguay; they have no fixed abodes, nor any boundaries, except what fear of their neighbours has established. They roam extensively in every direction, whenever the opportunity of attacking their enemies, or the necessity of avoiding them renders a journey advisable. The northern shore of the Rio Grande or Bermejo, which the Indians call Iñatè, was their native land in the last century. Thence they removed, to avoid the war carried on against Chaco by the Spaniards of Salta, at the commencement of this century, and migrating towards the south, took possession of a

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valley formerly held by the Calchaquis. This territory, which is about two hundred leagues in extent, they at present occupy. But from what region their ancestors came there is no room for conjecture. Ychamenraikin, chief cacique of the Abipones in the town of St. Jeronymo, told us, that, after crossing the vast waters, they were carried hither on an ass, and this he declared he had heard from ancient men. I have often thought that the Americans originally came, step by step, from the most northern parts of Europe, which are perhaps joined to America, or separated only by a narrow frith. We have observed some resemblance in the manners and customs of the Abipones to the Laplanders, and people of Nova Zembla, and we always noticed in these savages a magnetical propensity to the north, as if they inclined towards their native soil; for when irritated by any untoward event, they cried in a threatening tone—*Mahaik quer ereëgem*, I will go to the north; though this threat meant that they would return to the northern parts of Paraguay, where their savage compatriots live at this day, free from the yoke of the Spaniards, and from Christian discipline.

But if the Americans sprung from the north of Europe, why are all the Indians of both Americas destitute of beard, in which the northern Eu-

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straight, though very black locks. The vast extent of ocean which divides Africa from the southern parts of America, renders a passage difficult, and almost incredible, at a time when navigators, then unfurnished with the magnet, dared scarcely sail out of sight of the shore. The Africans, you will say, might have been cast by a storm on the shores of America; but how could the wild beasts have got there? Opposite to the shores of Paraguay lies the Cape of Good Hope, inhabited by Hottentots which, in the savageness of their manners, resemble the Paraguayrian Indians, but are totally different in the form of their bodies, in their customs, and language. Many may, with more justice, contend that Asia was the original country of the Americans, it being connected with America by some hitherto undiscovered tie; and so they may, with my free leave; nor, were I to hear it affirmed that the Americans fell from the moon, should I offer any refutation, but having experienced the inconstancy, volubility, and changefulness of the Indians, should freely coincide in that opinion. The infinite variety of tongues amongst the innumerable nations of America baffles all conjecture in regard to their origin. You cannot [197] discover the faintest trace of any European, African, or Asiatic language amongst them all.

[31] However, although I dare not affirm posi-

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tively whence the Abipones formerly came, I will at any rate tell you where they now inhabit. That vast extent of country bounded from north to south by the Rio Grande, or Iñatè, and the territories of Sta. Fè, and from east to west by the shores of the Paraguay, and the country of St. Iago, is the residence of the Abipones, who are distributed into various hordes. Impatient of agriculture and a fixed home, they are continually moving from place to place. The opportunity of water and provisions at one time, and the necessity of avoiding the approach of the enemy at another, obliges them to be constantly on the move. The Abipones imitate skilful chess-players. After committing slaughter in the southern colonies of the Spaniards, they retire far northwards, afflict the city of Asumpcion with murders and rapine, and then hurry back again to the south. If they have acted hostilities against the towns of the Guaranies, or the city of Corrientes, they betake themselves to the west. But if the territories of St. Iago or Cordoba have been the objects of their fury, they cunningly conceal themselves in the marshes, islands, and reedy places of the river Parana. For the Spaniards, however desirous, are not able to return the injuries of the savages, from the difficulty of the

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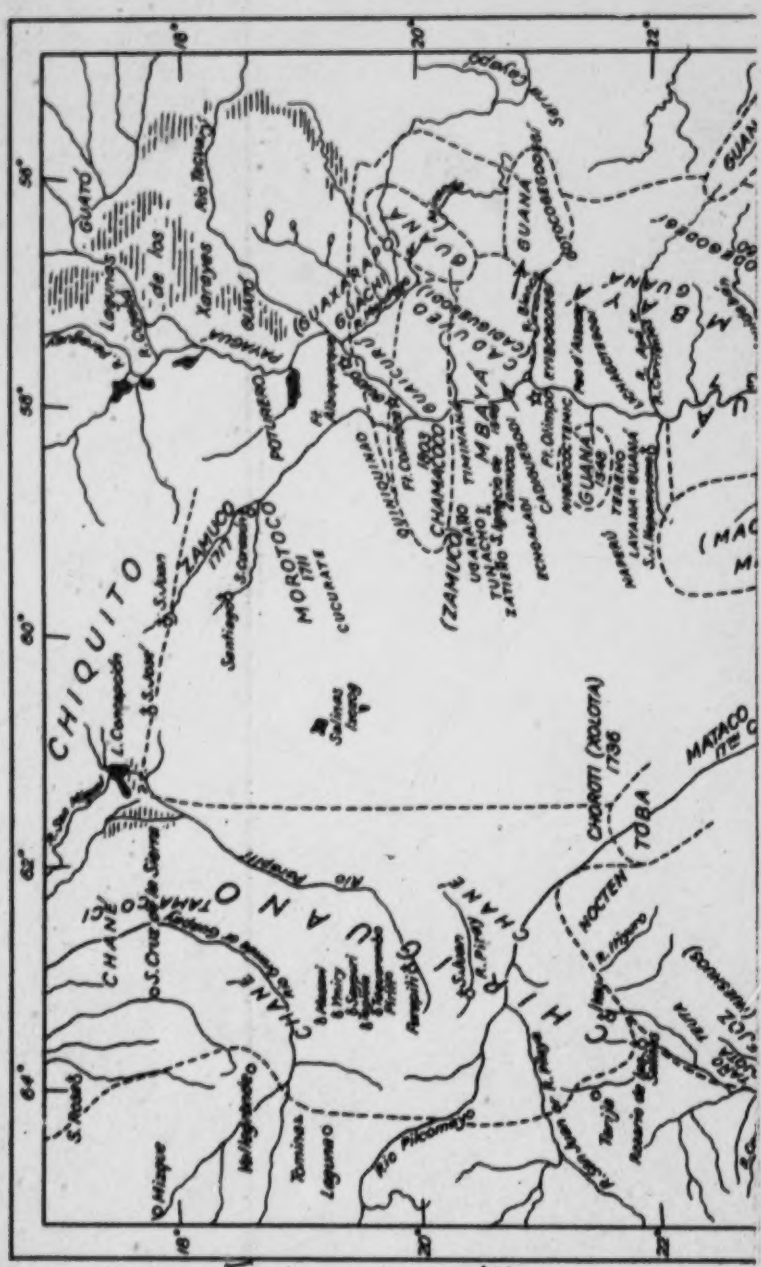
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Río Salado
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Río Grande
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Río Negro
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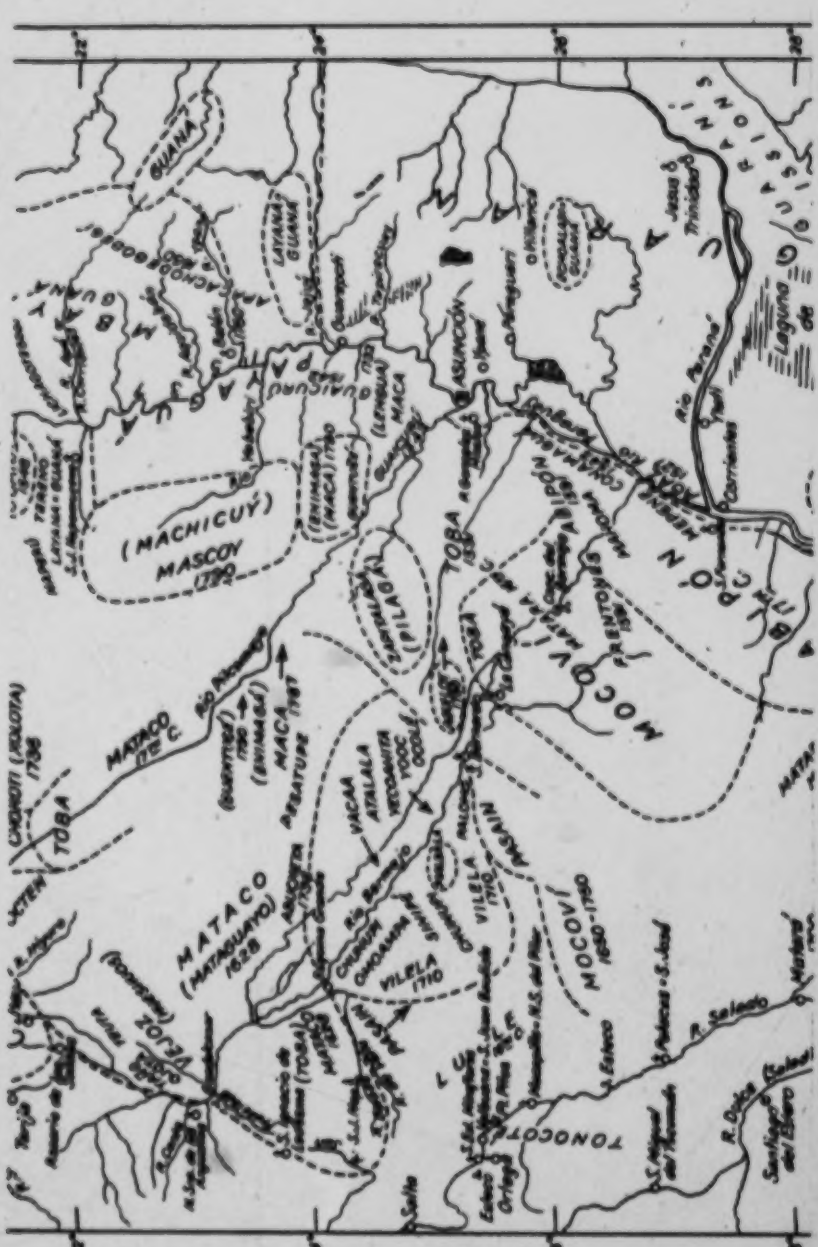

[Facing p. 198(B)]

MAP 4.–Tribes of the Gran Chaco: Locations at the first European contact.

[Facing p. 198(c)]

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